26 April

Report

**Rethinking Peace, Coexistence and Human Security
in the Great Lakes Region**

Kigali, Rwanda – Mille Collines Hotel
16-19 April 2002

## I. Introduction

The meeting grew out various discussions among several interested partners that led to the realization that they shared common objectives and strategies. Rather than organizing separate meetings, targeting the same people, it was decided to pool resources and combine efforts. Whether it was luck or design, the workshop evolved into a unique meeting involving a wide variety of people from the region as well as professional experiences. The discussions were stimulating and of a high quality, even controversial when sensitive issues were openly raised by participants.

The four day meeting was a collaborative effort between[1]:
- the Center for Conflict Management (CCM) at the National University of Rwanda (NUR);
- the Imagine Coexistence Project of UNHCR;
- the Center for International Development and Conflict Management (CIDCM) at University of Maryland; and
- the Commission on Human Security.

The objectives of the meeting were to bring together coexistence and conflict management practitioners and researchers:
- to explore approaches to peace and stability in the Great Lakes region of Africa;
- to share and develop information aimed at improving research and practice in Rwanda, in particular, and the region;
- to asses the impact of the Imagine Coexistence project and distil lessons learned; and
- to discuss conflict prevention and coexistence from a human security perspective.

In addition to putting the Commission and its work on the map in Rwanda, the meeting also served as a "sounding board" for some of the ideas being explored.

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[1] Funding for the meeting was provided by the UN Trust for Human Security, UNHCR, the Commission on Human Security, and the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

A total of some 130 people attended the meeting, from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda[2].  The participants included representatives from:
- civil society: peace, conflict management and development organizations, women and religious groups, coexistence projects, among others;
- researchers;
- national and local authorities from Rwanda.
- international or local organizations, including donor countries; and
- the media.

## II.  Observations on the Human Security discussions

At the start of the meeting, I presented the work of the Commission and the Human Security approach to the participants as a tool to guide the discussions on conflict and coexistence throughout the meeting.  Following a brief overview of the Commission, its objectives and expected output, I presented the working definition and the analytical and policy framework.  Subsequently, I looked at conflict prevention and coexistence and examined ways in which the human security concept/approach can contribute toward a better understanding and policy formulation (added value).

The subsequent discussion as well as the exchange during the four days proved to be very informative.  Considerable time was spent listening to the participants on how they saw Human Security.

Regarding the Human Security concept and the proposed analytical framework, my main observations are as follows:

a. **Implicit understanding of the Human Security concept**:  Little discussion took place about the intrinsic value of the concept itself.  Whether researchers or practitioners, they implicitly seem to understand its meaning and significance.[3]

b. **Focus on the immediate rather than the longer-term**:  To the majority of participants, human security related to immediate needs/threats that were considered the most pressing. Few participants related Human Security to the second part of the commission's working definition (long-term human fulfilment) as they considered it too abstract.

c. **Be concrete**:  Without doubt, this was one of the key messages.  The majority of comments related to what difference human security will make at the ground level. Even among the foreign donor and NGO community there was a certain scepticism:  "Will Human Security make a concrete difference to the way in

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[2] On the first and last day of the meeting, participation was limited to some 60 people.  During the other two days, representatives of grass roots agencies were

[3] Although this may be a side note, at the time of the meeting, a local Rwandan newspaper was carrying several articles on women's reproductive health using the term "human security"

which humanitarian and development work is being done or will it be a passing trend?"

d. **Protection**: In the context of the DRC, Burundi and Rwanda, the protection of people against human security threats was seen as key. Protection was interpreted in a broad sense, not only as access to life saving assistance or status but also as a means to achieve self-sufficiency. In the context of Rwanda, for example, considerable attention was given to the need for land reform and inheritance legislation so that widows can inherit land, which was seen as essential for economic survival as more than 90 per cent of the population are farmers.

e. **Empowerment of people:** This was a recurring theme throughout the four days. Participants argued that capacity building and empowerment of people were an essential strategy toward achieving Human Security. In part, this was a consequence of a confidence deficit on the part civil society in the authorities' capacity to ensure the protection of Human Security.

f. **State and human security**: Although the linkages between State and Human Security were not explicitly discussed, the debates touched upon some very sensitive issues. It pointed toward the potential tensions between the two concepts. For example, the Rwandan Government position emphasizes "national Rwandan identity", discouraging discussions about the identity of the two major communities as either Hutu or Tutsi. Many civil society groups argued that the country and the communities had to come to term with this reality and that the issues could not just be ignored if conflict is to be prevented in the future.[4] The often difficult discussion on this topic illustrated the analytical value of the human security concept as it brought to the foreground an issue which would not necessarily be looked at from a state security perspective.

III. **Human Security and Peace**

The discussion on peace, conflict prevention and management was led by the Center for Conflict Management (CCM) at the National University of Rwanda (NUR) and the Center for International Development and Conflict Management (CIDCM) at the University of Maryland. The considerable focus was on the setting of a research agenda as well as developing a network across the region to exchange information and learn from each other's experiences. The discussions were particularly helpful in regard to:

a. **Need for a regional/situational approach**: Albeit the majority of conflicts today are of an internal nature, their impact across borders should not be underestimated. Likewise, conflicts in neighbouring countries will have an impact upon internal conflict prevention and management. Interestingly,

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[4] Many participants considered the discussion on this issues among the meetings highlight. The fact that they were in a position to relatively freely discuss this was appreciated and said that this would not have been possible if the meeting had not been organized by bodies such as the Commission on Human Security.

throughout the discussions on conflict prevention in Rwanda and reconciliation, the involvement of Rwanda in the DRC conflict was taboo. It was only raised within the context of the concluding peace negotiations on the DRC taking place in Sun City, South Africa, at the time of the meeting.

b. **Conflict prevention requires that the social, economic and security dimensions be addressed**: Throughout the discussions the interrelationship/linkages among the various factors leading to conflict were recognized as well as the need to address them in a comprehensive manner.

c. **Exclusion**: In the context of the Great Lakes region, exclusion on the basis of community identity is critical to understand the causes of conflict. Many participants emphasized the need to further study this question. Although poverty in itself was not considered as a cause of conflict, it may lead to the exclusion of the poor from accessing their rights. Similar, the exclusion of people in the governance process was considered as a potential cause for conflict. The role of the donor policies was also questioned: They sometimes contribute toward conflict by giving more opportunities to some communities than to others.

d. **Rebuilding communities:** Considerable discussion took place on the impact of the breakdown of the social, economic, political and security fabric, holding the society together, during conflict. Many argued that greater attention should be given to the role of women in rebuilding communities, as the majority of men were either killed or facing trial. Rather than focusing on grand-scale projects, they urged donors to look at community-based projects.

e. **Citizenship**: The question of citizenship was raised in the context of the return of refugees as well as a factor contributing to conflict in the region. The question was also discussed within the context of participation in the governance process.

## IV. Human Security and Coexistence

The discussion on the coexistence was led by UNHCR with the active involvement and sharing of experiences by civil society organizations. Since 2000, various small-scale pilot projects were initiated and a lessons learned exercise was underway.[5] Particularly enriching were the presentation by the Executive Secretary of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission as well as the exchange of regional experiences among practitioners.

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[5] The "Imagine Coexistence" pilot project will be evaluated at a workshop organized jointly by UNHCR and the Tufts University, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, from 11 to 13 June 2002.

a. **People owned process**:  Following conflict, the absence of justice was considered as a potential source of conflict.  However, if it is to be effective, the process should be owned by the people in whose name it is being carried out rather than being the preserve of the leadership alone.  Considerable discussion took place of the Gacaca trials.  Also in this context, the community identity issue arose strongly.

b. **Coexistence and reconciliation are multidimensional processes**: Neither can be achieved in a vacuum and requires participation at all levels as well as economic, political, social as humanitarian components.

c. **Mainstream coexistence**:  Whereas Gacaca trials are managed from the top down, coexistence is a bottom-up process.  To be successful it depends upon the engagement of the particular communities directly involved.  In this sense, it is a much more flexible process than reconciliation and truth commissions as they can be tailored according to the communities needs.  As it is a long term process, extending beyond the normal humanitarian time frame, coexistence activities should be mainstreamed into development related activities.

d. **Anchor coexistence around concrete activities:**  To be effective and rebuild trust and relationships between divided communities, coexistence projects should engage the communities in essential or profitable activities, such as jointly managing water points, income generating projects, etc.

e. **Role of the media**:  In communities marked by high rates of illiteracy and limited education opportunities, the media plays a critical role in the transmission of information and tolerance.  Greater attention to the role of the media, in particular radio, should be given as an education tool.

## IV.    Conclusion

The meeting was very successful.  The active involvement of civil society groups led to a stimulating debate about the processes of peace, coexistence and human security from a community perspective.  Although they did not necessarily use the language adopted in the working definition and the proposed analytical framework, there was an implicit understanding, appreciation and support of the concept of Human Security.  The test, however, will be the extent to which it will make a concrete and tangible difference to the people.

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